

NSC BRIEFING

4 January 1955

COMMUNIST GAINS IN SYRIA

- I. Past year in Syria has seen significant Communist gains, although threat of forceful takeover is remote.
 - A. British Middle East experts call Syria "most worrisome spot in confused Middle East."
 - B. Communists have exploited political instability following overthrow of Dictator Shishakli a year ago (he reported skirt-chasing in Paris).
- II. They number some 10,000 out of 3 1/2 million population--are infiltrating government, army, press and labor. Are on way to acquiring position of public respectability unique for an Arab state.
 - A. Moscow-trained party leader, Khalid Bakdash (who considered ablest Arab Communist) has won seat in parliament, is on foreign affairs committee.
 - B. Minister of Justice--Ali Buzo--is friend of Bakdash.
 - C. Boss of army's cultural affairs program--a Communist--is feeding propaganda to army.
 - D. Among nine directors of major labor federation are 2 Communists, 1 sympathizer.
 - E. One-third of Syrian political press (total 38 dailies and weeklies) reportedly subsidized by Communists; another third follows line.

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III. Communists collaborating with extremists of left and right, also with opportunistic independents. Aim: downfall of Premier Khouri's ineffectual coalition government.

A. 80-year-old Khouri wants to leave office by March '55 at latest.

1. Center parties impotent to produce better government.
2. Thus, next regime could well be pro-leftist, with Communists able exercise increased influence.

B. Alternate possibility is rightist military coup, as in recent past--though army badly split.

1. Such development probably only major block to present trend.
2. However, military dictatorship presents own host of problems.

IV. Recent report of Soviet intent to stimulate Kurdish nationalism in Syria and Iraq appear unrelated to Communist planning in Syria.

A. Party leader Bakdash is Kurd himself, but plays down fact to enhance his appeal to nationalistic Syrians.

B. Syrian Kurds less easily stirred than fellow tribesmen on Iraq-Iran-Turkey border.

C. Use of Kurds more probably aimed at making trouble for "Northern Tier" pair--Iran, Turkey.

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